

To: Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, February 16, 2016

Senator Beth Bye and Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chairs

Subject: House Bill 5044, specifically funding for the Connecticut Humanities Council Inc. within the budget of the Connecticut State Library

Testimony submitted by Margaret Smith, Curator/Archivist , Kent Historical Society, Kent, CT

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Bye and Walker, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to voice my opinions about CT Humanities and what it does for the people of our state. My name is Marge Smith. As the curator/archivist and former Executive Director of the Kent Historical Society, I have written many successful grants to CT Humanities (CTH) for a variety of needs. We have also benefitted indirectly but powerfully by participating in 11 years of the CT League's Professional Basics program and two years of the pilot StEPs-CT program, both funded by CT Humanities.

When I began volunteering for the Kent Historical Society (KHS) close to two decades ago, we had fewer than 60 members, and the president was wondering what to do with the assets of the society when it folded. Now we have close to 400 members and a busy group of staff, board and volunteers. CT Humanities is in a sense responsible for every step of our upward progress.

CT Humanities does not give money away! This must be clearly understood – they make us work hard to earn every penny, grant after grant. Each grant requires a detailed follow up report as well, and I always have that in mind as I craft the initial project.

Last year, the KHS exhibit focused on the history of the many summer sleep-away camps in Kent. Using my training from Professional Basics, and years of observing the reactions of

previous exhibit visitors, I knew that we would have to dig deeper into the story – to tell more than just where the camps were, who went to them, etc. We took a close look at what was going on in society at the time summer camps really began 100-plus years ago, and found that there were enormous social upheavals happening nationally that made people very worried about the physical and mental health and well-being of their children. The founding directors were on serious missions to instill a sense of self-worth, teamwork and empathy in their young charges. Many former Kent campers came from all over the country to see our exhibit and to share their own stories about how their years at camps had a huge impact on who they became when they grew up. I was most touched by a pair of sisters who came to me, with tears in their eyes to say, “*Thank you* for caring enough to tell our story to the world and for helping us understand how and why it all came about. It’s easy to forget those lessons sometimes.”

That is the essence of what CT Humanities does with the valuable funding that it receives. We need to continually collectively remind ourselves who we are as people, where we came from, why we do what we do and what the long term-implications of our actions are. Republican or Democrat; rich or poor; straight or gay; black, brown or white, we are all human. If we lose that understanding, we are doomed as a society. The messages conveyed by CTH-supported programs are, by their very nature of being humanities based, critically needed in this current time of political, social and racial divisiveness and even hatred! And we need to continue to get our funding straight from CTH! They have their finger on the pulse of our communities in a way that someone in a legislative level more removed from us would not. Cutting direct funding to this extremely efficient and effective organization could have bad implications for the future of our human society. I am begging you to maintain this valuable, proven CT Humanities regrant pool! Thank you for your time and attention.